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SUBJECT: COMMONWEALTH: CONSERVATIVES CALL FOR
REINVIGORATED, FRESH ENGAGEMENT

REF: 08 LONDON 2304

11. (SBU) As the Commonwealth turned 60 in March 2009, Conservative Shadow Foreign Secretary William Hague outlined the Conservative Party's plan to reinvigorate the Commonwealth in order to promote democracy, foster sound political and financial governance, and open new opportunities in trade and enterprise. Noting the Commonwealth's past support to ending apartheid in South Africa, pressuring Zimbabwe to return to democratic norms, and alleviating tensions in Pakistan, Hague outlined five areas where a Conservative Government would enhance the role of the Commonwealth:

- Expansion of membership and partnerships to bring new dynamism and new enthusiasm;
- Increasing conflict prevention and resolution efforts through the Commonwealth's good offices by establishment of a semi-permanent secretariat to support mediation and peaceful outcomes, building on what the Commonwealth has done in Lesotho, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Cameroon, and Kenya;
- Bolstering failed state reconstruction efforts by drawing on the Commonwealth's expertise in post-conflict resolution, development, education, and health;
- Extending the organization's influence beyond its traditional membership and building bridges where its expertise is welcomed, especially as a conduit of reform in the Arab and Muslim worlds; and,
- Developing it as a forum for tackling cross-cutting international issues, such as climate change, trafficking in persons, and inter-faith dialogue.

12. (U) "In an age of networks," Hague said, the Commonwealth "can be one of the most valuable networks of all" because it is flexible in more practical ways than most other international institutions and it has a global reach with its "unparalleled ability to reach across the barriers of culture and geography, forming alliances between developed and emerging economies."

Comment

13. (SBU) The UK Government uses the Commonwealth as a network to transmit its foreign policy priorities and as a means of consulting developing countries outside of the more formal frameworks of other international institutions. It also sees the organization as a means to access G-77 members in a forum where traditional UN voting blocks do not apply and engage these developing countries on cross-cutting international

issues, like climate change and re-designing the architecture of international financial institutions (ref A). Ultimately, the Commonwealth is valued by Tories as a symbol of the legacy of the British empire - a mechanism to point to whenever the value of the Empire is questioned. As a Tory MP commented to poloff, "it lets us say, see the Empire wasn't so bad or why else do our former colonies still want to be in the Commonwealth?"

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